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ABSTRACT

Noting that comprehension studies have stressed the importance of determining the main idea of reading instruction, this paper offers a teaching strategy--the Modified Language Experience Method--that has proven successful in teaching main ideas to secondary school students. The paper first compares the strategy, which begins with the general comprehension of a paragraph and moves to the specific understanding of the main idea, to the more commonly used subskill method of instruction, which begins with the specific understanding of the main idea and moves to the general comprehension of the paragraph. The major portion of the paper contains a 12-week schedule for using the strategy that outlines preimplementation, implementation, and postimplementation activities. The paper concludes with complete descriptions of four activities illustrating the use of the strategy. (FL)

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Determining the Main Idea In Secondary School Reading Through The Modified Language Experience Method

-- A Psycholinguistic Process -

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Determining the Main Idea
In Secondary School Reading
The Subskill Method Versus the
Modified Language Experience Method

- A Psycholinguistic Process -

Philosophy:

Studies on main idea comprehension stress that determining the main idea is an important aspect of reading instruction on both the elementary and secondary levels. Pedagogical opinion indicates that The Subskill Method of teaching reading still is exemplified today.

Recent research (Rowe, 1980) concludes that the main idea in reading on the secondary level can be taught as successfully, if not more successfully, by The Modified Language Experience Method rather than by The Subskill Method. Students and teachers alike will find The Modified Language Experience Method contributing creativity and interest to the learning process. Shafer (1978) points out, "...language experience has been validated by the psycholinguistic model of teaching reading and is a fertile area which can be cultivated in the secondary reading program." (p. 315)

Two different methods for determining the main idea are denoted by the use of The Subskill Method and The Language Experience Method. The Subskill Method begins with the specific understanding of the main idea and moves to the general comprehension of the paragraph. The Modified Language Experience Method begins with the general comprehension of the paragraph and moves to the specific understanding of the main idea.

Population:

The program described in the following pages took place in two separate semesters. Each semester approximately 300 ninth graders were examined after testing. The qualifying target population for the original study was 64 students while the qualifying target population for the Replication study was 44 students.

Schedule:

The following information provides a twelve-week time schedule for processing The Modified Language Experience Method. Components of the process are Pre-implementation, weeks one - four; Implementation, weeks five - ten; and Post-implementation, weeks eleven - twelve. Students meet once a week for 45 minutes. School systems could adapt the schedule to fit their own situation.

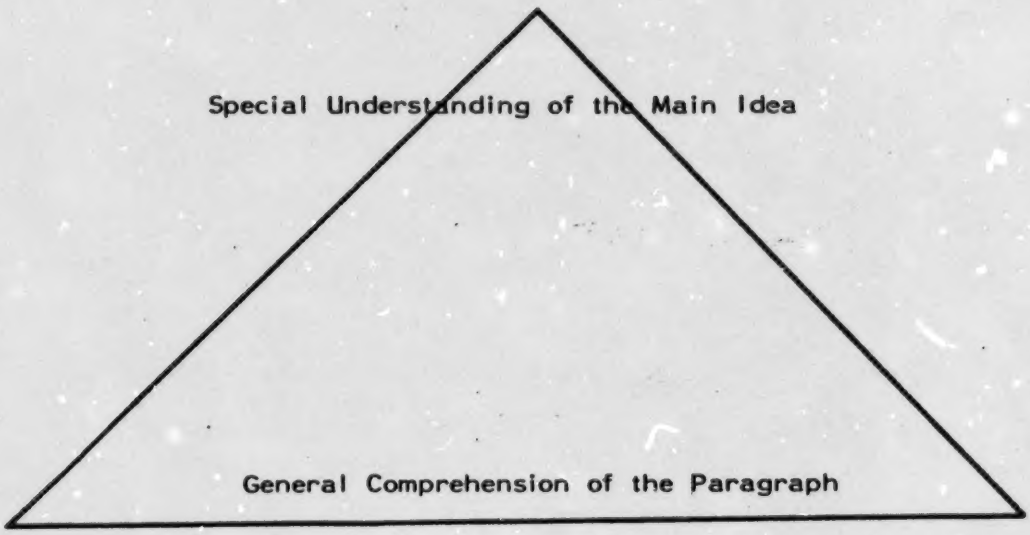
Procedure:

I. Pre-implementation:

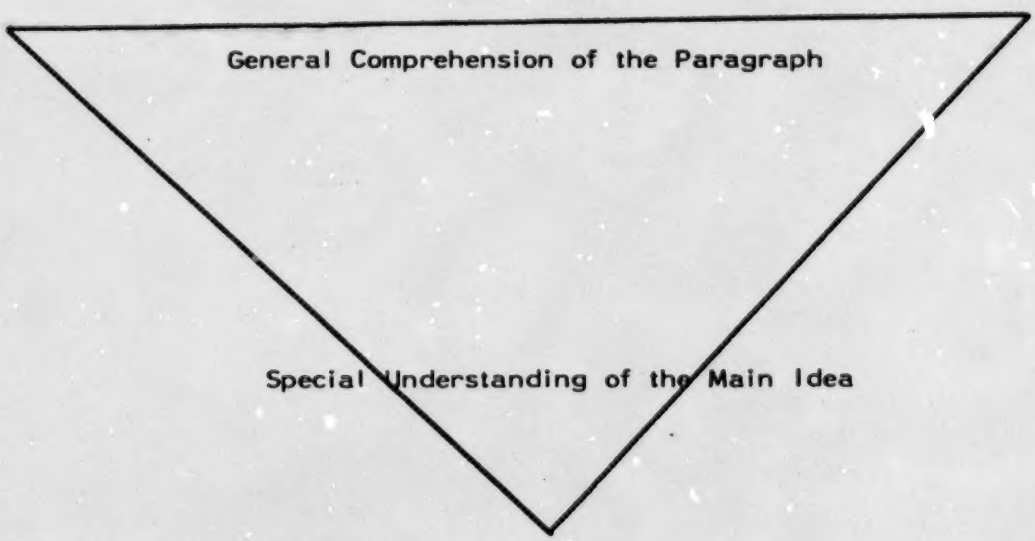
(weeks 1-2) A. Administer a timed standardized reading test to determine if the student's reading comprehension is on or above grade equivalent.

(week 3) B. Adm'nister an untimed criterion reference test to determine which of the students who are reading on or above grade equivalent score lower than 80% on determining the main idea from material written at their grade equivalent.

SUBSKILL METHOD - Figure 1



MODIFIED LANGUAGE, EXPERIENCE METHOD



I. Pre-implementation . . . continued

C. Select students for The Modified Language Experience Method for Determining the Main Idea who, as indicated by the standardized reading test and the criterion reference test results are:

1. Reading on or above their grade equivalent.
2. Scoring lower than 80% on determining the main idea.

(week 4) D. Confer with each student as to the results of the two tests.

(weeks 5-8) II. Implementation:

A. Provide the student with a different object to observe for each 45-minute reading period for four reading periods.

B. Select objects of interest such as:

1. An activities letter from the high school enrolled.
2. A double deck of boxed cards
3. A calculator
4. A cactus plant

C. Tell the student each time:

1. "Here is a _____."
2. "Please make a point in respect to, or take a stand concerning, information that you believe to be true about this object."
   a. "You can describe the object."
   b. "You can discuss an incident of which the object reminds you."

II. Implementation . . . continued

3. "You have five minutes to think about what you would like to say."
4. "Then, you are to dictate the information to me. I shall record it exactly as you tell me." (Dictation is used so that the student will not avoid the use of a word because of uncertainty concerning spelling.)
5. "As you are dictating to me, I also shall be tape recording your information in order that we may verify what I have written." (This step is optional. You may, however, wish to include the tape recording for purpose of further analysis later.)
6. "When the dictation is completed, I shall give you the written copy of the information you have told me."
7. "I want you to read the information and give me a list of the aspects you think I should remember from the information." (Request three or four aspects.)
8. "I shall write down this list as you dictate it to me."
9. "As you look at this completed list, what is the most important point that you want me to remember?"
10. "Try to give the most important point in as few words as possible."

II. Implementation . . . continued

11. "The most important point is your main idea."

12. "I shall record the main idea below your original dictation following your list of aspects."

13. "What is the location of the main idea in the dictated material?"

    a. "At the beginning?"

    b. "Near the middle?"

    c. "At the end?"

    d. "Being implied without being stated?"

14. "Are you satisfied with the main idea originally stated?" (Since this was the student's work, she or he is allowed the final decision on the main idea after the teacher offers guidance and instruction as indicated above.)

(Samples of student language experience stories are placed at the end of the paper. The important aspects, the main idea, and the location of the main idea are included.)

(week 9-10) D. Ask each student to read four short professionally written paragraphs each reading period for two reading periods. A total of eight paragraphs should be read. (The paragraphs should be on the student's grade equivalent.)

E. After the student has completed reading each paragraph say:

1. "Record 3-5 aspects you think I should remember from the paragraph. Use complete sentences.

II. Implementation . . . continued

2. "As you look at this list, what is the most important aspect you want me to remember?" Answers should be in complete sentences.
3. "Try to give the most important point in as few words as possible."
4. "The most important aspect is your main idea."
5. "What is the location of the main idea in the paragraph?"
   a. "At the beginning?"
   b. "Near the middle?"
   c. "At the end?"
   d. "Being implied without being stated?"
6. "Let us see if you agree with the answer key to determine if you and the author believe the main idea of the paragraph to be the same."
7. "If you and the author disagree, you may follow one of two approaches:"
   a. "You may defend your original answer by explaining why you believe your selection of the main idea is correct."
   b. "You may change your mind and agree with the author."

III. Post-implementation:

(week 11) A. Administer the same untimed criterion reference test used as a pretest as a posttest. Results will determine which students who are reading on or above grade level, but are scoring lower than 80% on deter-

III. Post-implementation . . . continued

mining the main idea, have improved on determining the main idea, and how much they have improved.

(week 12) B. Conduct an individual conference with each student to discuss the results of the 12-week project.

Conclusion:

As in Rowe's study (1980) results should show a decided increase in the scores of the posttest over the pretest. Students and teachers alike will find The Modified Language Experience Method to be academically satisfying because it is creative and interesting. Students will feel that they are playing an active part in their learning process.

Rowe, E.M., An Experiment for determining the main idea in secondary school reading - the subskill method versus the modified language experience method. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Northern Illinois University, 1980.

Shafer, R.E., Will psycholinguists change reading in the secondary schools? Journal of Reading, 1978, 21, 305-316.

#32

Monday, 9-10

HIGH SCHOOL ACTIVITIES LETTER

The D reminds me of when I was at a varisty basketball game because my brother was on the team. They were playing against _____ and _____ had a winning streak because the last six years or more they were undefeated in their division. Throughout almost the whole game, neither team led by more than three points. _____ was the state champ one year. So, they were real hard to beat. The bleachers were filled to capacity with our fans screaming and yelling. It was coming down to the last minutes of the game and _____ was winning by about three points when one of their players fouled one of our players. That player went up to shoot a free throw and he got the first one and the second one. So, we were down by only one point and the fans were getting really excited. Then, we got one more basket and went on to win by seven points. We were the first team to end their winning streak.

Aspects to Remember

1. My brother was on the varsity team.
2. _____ had a winning streak in their division for over six years.
3. They were difficult to beat.
4. It was coming down to the last minutes of the game when one of our players shot two free throws to put us only one point behind.
5. We won the game by seven points becoming the first team to beat them in their winning streak.

The Most Important Point, Main Idea

We ended _____'s winning streak.

Location of the Main Idea

The end.

#18

Thursday, 13-14

DECK OF CARDS

The cards remind me of when my sister and I used to play war. My sister would lose the game and she would throw the cards and make me find them. Sometimes I couldn't find all of them and then my mom would want to play cards and some of them would be missing. So then I told my mom about the "war" and she would make my sister find the cards. So then my sister would vacuum the floor and some of the cards would go into the vacuum. So then my sister had to clean out the vacuum bag. Some of the cards were still gone so my mother threw the deck out and bought a new one. Mother never let my sister use the good, new cards.

Aspects to Remember

1. The cards remind me of when my sister and I played "war."
2. My sister lost some cards.
3. My mom had to buy a new deck.

The Most Important Point, Main Idea

Playing war with cards created a problem.

Location of the Main Idea

Implied.

#2

Thursday, 3-4

CACTUS

I remember when my best friend, little brother and I were racing our motorcycles. My brother was the last one to start off. I won and my best friend came in second. We decided to race back and I was showing off. I was riding "wheelies," I fell off my motorcycle into a giant cactus. My friend and my brother came to help me and I was full of thorns. My friend said to rip my clothes off instead of pulling them off so they wouldn't scratch me. My brother kept on laughing. I finally made it home. I had to put bactine all over me.

Aspects to Remember

1. Three of us were racing our motorcycles.
2. I was showing off.
3. I fell into a giant cactus.

The Most Important Point, Main Idea

I fell off my motorcycle into a giant cactus.

Location of the Main Idea

The middle.

#44

Monday, 3-4

CALCULATOR

There are many things you can do with a calculator. A calculator is used to add, subtract, multiply, divide and, on most of them, you can find the square root. They're used by many people for many different things. Some things you can do with it is when you can balance your check book with it. And, sometimes you can even spell out a name, or there are also riddles that you can do with it.

Aspects to Remember

1. You can add, subtract, multiply, divide, or find a square root.
2. You can balance your check book.
3. Sometimes you can spell out names.
4. You can do riddles.

The Most Important Point, Main Idea

You can do many things with a calculator.

Location of the Main Idea

The beginning.